Life of Mrs. Anna Elizabeth Mandler (Mrs. Ira Wells)

Once upon a time as the story goes there lived a man in far away Prussia. He was born in the village Lamspach, belonging to the evangelical parish Wissmar. His name was Johann George Mandler, a tailor by trade. He took unto himself a wife and settled down to make a home by diligently plying his trade in the town of Giessen nestled near the shores of the Main in Prussia. In time two baby girls were born in this home with dark hair and eyes-and then again on the bright and beautiful morning of July 10, 1822 (July 10th, 1822) there came another sweet faced blue eyed baby girl with golden hair to dwell with and share with them the good and ills of life. She was christened in the Lutheran Church "Anna Elizabeth Mandler". Her childhood was not unlike that of other children in the parish. She entered school at the age of seven and was finished at the age of (15) fifteen as was then the rule and custom of that province. At her father's knee she learned the art of the needle and much of the work of the tailor which knowledge proved of great help to her in later years. Two more children had been added to the home circle in the meantime, one boy another girl, making five in number. The father being a well informed man and dealing much with the public had in some way (I know not how) learned of America the "Land of Promise". After much careful thought he conceived the idea of launching out across the deep waters to assist in the building up of a new empire. Accordingly in the year 1837 he left his home, friends and people and embarked with his wife and five children to sail towards the new world of which very little was known at that time. For three months they were tossed about by wind and wave on shipboard and were finally landed at New Orleans much travel-worn and jaded yet with memories of many pleasantries. There had been music and dancing and other amusements and diversions

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They could speak no word of English and none could speak to them in the softer tongue of their mother country. They learned by signs and motions. The eldest daughter sickened and died there. In a few months they went to St. Louis and in 1839 the mother sickened with malarial fever and died leaving the father with four children, the youngest but three years old. They were all discouraged and disheartened and decided to push on up the Mississippi River to find a better location. Their next stop was at the town of Rock Island in Rock Island County, Ill., then a very thriving little city. The U. S. Arsenal Barracks were there, and other things of interest. Chicago was then in its infancy and very little known. The pioneer spirit kept calling and urging him on and they went to the town of Hampton still in Rock Island County, on the banks of the Mississippi as all traffic and freight were handled by boats on the river at that time. There he established himself in business again. With the help of his daughter he maintained a home and tailor shop. The work of building and developing the new country was in progress and the Mandler family entered in with heart and might to carry on the work to the best of their ability. Thus the pioneer spirit was engendered into the hearts and lives of all the children, and they learned to love the country. In later years the son and brother volunteered for the Civil War service, were honorably discharged at the close but soon passed on from the hardships and exposure during the struggle.

One beautiful spring morning in the early month of May when all nature seemed at its best, with flowers blooming, birds singing, green grass waving and the sun shining over all-Anna Elisabeth Mandler went to the village church as was her custom. She met there for the first time a young man with soldiery bearing, fine erect carriage, dark hair, blue eyes and friendly smile. She became interested with his pleasing manner. He was introduced by friends as Ira Wells, but recently out of the Black Hawk war, having

served as a 2nd lieutenant, during the skirmish, capture and vanquishment of Capt. Black Hawk and his warriors in 1837. On the 10th of December, 1844, Anna Elizabeth Handler became the wife of the same Ira Wells at her family home in Hampton Bluff, near which they began the work of making their new home in a little house built of logs, overlooking the beautiful little valley of Rock River, where Captain Black Hawk and his brave warriors fought their last battle only a few miles from Rock Island on one hand and Hampton on the other. Three years they lived there--one child was born to them there. Then came the Government call for settlers for the Oregon Country—Oregon must be saved for America—Oregon must have settlers. Then came promise of land on which to build homes for those who would come and bring families. That pioneer spirit kept whispering to them Go—go west and grow up with the country. The country was new where they were. The Indians had been driven out—land was rich and they owned a reasonable share and their people all lived near them. It was hard, so hard, to think of leaving all and going out into they knew not what, but the urge was strong- there were Indians to subdue, more forests to conquer and a wild country to tame down. They must do their part towards building an empire for America, so the decision was made, the die cast, and they began preparations for the journey.

One day in the early part of April, 1847 when all nature was beginning to put forth her new garments of green, amid tears and bowed heads a little company gathered together with covered wagons and ox teams, a few horses and cows and the necessary articles of food and raiment, and started out on their perilous journey across mountains and valleys and barren wastes. Not knowing where they were going or what might befall them before they reached their journey's end, or what they would find should they be fortunate enough to ever reach the goal for which they had started, [they experienced]

six long months of toil and struggle beset with a constant fear of an Indian outbreak or perhaps an attack by wild animals that roamed the forests in plentiful numbers. But they were a brave people, none faltered or failed, none murmured or complained, nor did they turn back. All had set out with determined hearts to reach the west and there to do their best. With wagons and oxen they would form a circle with the women and children in the center, while men with rifles and muskets stood guard on the outside thus forming a circle within a circle for protection at night from the marauding Indians. Even so they were sometimes surprised to find they had stealthily crept in and stampeded their cattle, causing much delay. But they had no serious trouble with them. They treated them kindly, gave them food, and they in turn let them move on in peace. At the crossing of the Rogue river on this journey occurred the first great sorrow of their married life by the death of their first born child, perhaps 18 months old. The Mother left her sleeping in the wagon while she went to the assistance of her fellow travelers, whose goods, bedding and food had gotten wet in crossing the river. The wagon was started in her absence, the child was thrown from the wagon, fell under the wheels and was crushed to death. It was a great shock and lasting sorrow to the young Mother, whose heart yearned for and sorrowed over this first little one, till life's latest day. She could not bear to leave the little body in the wilderness alone, so kind friends helpt and they carried her to the first signs of a white man's habitation that was Eugene Skinners. They buried her on Skinners Butte, having reached that point Oct. 14th, 1847, and there the company disbanded, each going their several ways looking for locations.

The Skinners welcomed the emigrants with open doors and arms and

rendered them much aid in locating claims and pointing out directions. Mr. Skinner's family were the only white persons living in Eugene at the time, save one bachelor man. Mr. Wells left his wife with them while he went out looking for a claim. He located a 640 acre tract where Cottage Grove now is, and they moved on the claim; on April 9th, 1848 their second daughter was born, the first white child born in Lane County, and the first white child ever seen by those Indians and they wanted her. They would take her from her cradle or from the mother's arms, and fondle, nod their heads, laugh, and pass her from one to the other, while the mother stood terrorized with fear, but there was nothing she could say or do. Sometimes they came in their war paints. They always wanted bread and more bread and milk and bacon or any thing they could see to eat. Mrs. Wells more through fear for her child gave them of all she had. March 25, 1849 was born their first baby boy, and then came more demonstrations among the Indians and finally they began to take on an hostile attitude. ~~And~~ then came the wild cry of gold in California. The news spread rapidly and soon the great rush of 1849 was on. Mr. Wells and his brother, Dr. Daniel Wells, were the only men left to guard the women against the Indians ~~and they~~ who were parading around in their war paint. They decided to abandon their claims there and look elsewhere, for the situation ~~being~~ was so alarming. More emigrants had come and were still coming, more settlements were springing up; every man's house was his castle, built of logs with a wooden latch on the door that responded to the pull of a string and that string always hung on the outside to every other white person, and no house was ever so full but what there was always room for more; none were ever turned away, always glad for a friendly white face.

Such was the home of Levi Scott of Scotts Valley near Yoncalla, and

there Mrs. Wells with her two small children found refuge for the fall and winter of 1850 and 51.

Mr. Wells, never idle, went out with his brother scouting around looking for a new location. The Hudson's Bay Company was then at Fort Umpqua, near where Elkton town now stands. In looking over the territory and visiting the Fort, they both found a realization of their dream of a house site--one two miles below the fort, and the other three miles above on the banks of the beautiful flowing Umpqua. Mr. Wells chose the one above the Fort, and there staked out his 640 acre Donation Land Claim in the fall of 1850, built a cabin and began to make preparations for a home for his family. October 13th, 1850, there came another baby girl to their family circle born at the house of the Scotts in Scotts Valley. Scottsburg, 20 miles below Fort Umpqua at the head of tidewater where ocean vessels unloaded their cargoes, was fast rising to the dimensions of a city. All was excitement everywhere, with the gold rush and heavy tide of immigration from all quarters, there was need for haste in locating claims and establishing homes. But how to get them when located was another problem; no roads, no trails, no way to get supplies; but again there was no wavering nor faltering. During the winter they blazed a trail as best they could from Yoncalla through Drain to the Umpqua.

Then once again as the verdure of spring began to appear and all nature burst into new life, activities began to increase around the Scott home, They gathered together their few possessions ~~which was~~, little enough save stout hearts and willing hands, good neighbors and friends. There were no towns at that time, just a vast untamed wilderness, no near source of supplies. In accordance with the prearrangements in the first days of April (if I make no mistake the 6th day) 1851 the pack horses and mules

were gathered around and carefully loaded with this, that and the other. Chickens were placed in coops or sacks and in equal number placed across the mules' back to maintain a proper balance. Pigs the same to maintain a proper balance--cows and oxen were driven or followed on foot. Other necessities, personal effects and what not were packed in similar manner. And finally the mother with babe in her arms mounted a horse, the father walked holding another child, a friend with the family carried the boy or in turn he would ride on the horse behind the mother. She would hold him on with one hand and the babe with the other, allowing the horse to use his own intelligence without guidance except for the gentle voice and kindly words to which he responded and cautiously picked his way over the rough, dim and dangerous trail, fording streams and climbing mountains where no white woman had ever been before. One other woman (the brother's wife) was with this little company on the way to her new home too. Thus they blazed the trail for others to follow. The trail had been used some by the Umpqua tribe of Indians in passing from the south of the river to their hunting grounds near where Yoncalla now is. After 20 miles of this dangerous and rugged mountainous riding the valley began to open up before them and she came to the end of the long trail and found what seemed to her the most beautiful spot she had ever beheld and it was to be her home forever while she lived. With her German Bible clasped in her arms she fell upon her knees giving thanks and praise to God and burst into tears. This was home, her children's home, this wonderful climate with an abundance of good water and wood and wild game. The hardships of the trail were forgotten for a time, and all were so busy, neighbor helping neighbor in getting settled. But oh, what hardships were yet to come. The virgin soil must be broken up with slow moving oxen, wheat grown for

winter flour and hauled to Oregon City by the same slow oxen to be ground into flour, taking two weeks or ~~fourteen days~~ longer to make the round trip having first thrashed the grain with a flail and winnowed in a pan. In lieu of flour, boiled wheat was resorted to; many meals were made on boiled wheat alone. But they were not discouraged--there was a greater Oregon ahead. More settlers were coming every year. Some of California's gold dust was being scattered, gold croppings were being found in Oregon. Scottsburg was rapidly growing as a seaport town where supplies could be gotten by two days' travel with horses. But alas for Scottsburg and alas for the hopes of the settlers, alas, alas!

In the last days of November 1861 there came a tremendous downpour of rain; On Dec. 1st, 1861 the Umpqua river had risen until its banks were full to overflowing and still it rained and on the 8th day of Dec. 1861 the banks did overflow and the whole country around about was flooded with water and Scottsburg was washed out to sea. The people fled to the hills for safety. The harbor was completely destroyed as well as the city. But that was not all, the end was not yet. On ~~the~~ New Year's day 1862 it began to snow and it snowed for days and days and was followed by a long siege of hard freezing weather; the snow laid on and the people suffered with cold and hunger. The stock suffered and died and starved until there was almost nothing left in the country. It was a terrible time known ever after as the hard winter of '61 and '-2 ('61 and '62), and so Scottsburg with all its fair promise faded into history which meant more than can be told to the early settlers of the Umpqua Valley. But they still held to their faith in the young state; they lived and struggled and hoped for better days.

June 4th, 1852 another baby girl came to this house. The first born on this new claim, and the first white girl babe born at this point on the Umpqua and as the years rolled on six more children were added to the home circle making a total of eleven children born by this mother. One in 1855

was born while the family with other families were under guard in a fort when the Rogue River Indians were hostile and on the rampage and the Umpquas threatened to join them.

It was a busy life with roads to build and the struggle for a livelihood. There was no time to spare. The country must be developed, advances made, schools established, which thought was the mother's greatest worry--the lack of educational facilities and advantages for the children. She would walk the floor back and forth and twist the corner of her apron (as was her custom in deep thought) and study, ponder and ponder how it could be done. There was no mail service, no books, magazines or newspapers, nothing but her dear old German bible she had brought across the briny deep and the father's bible that had been brought with him from the State of Vermont in 1828. Well, in time, they got hold of one copy of Webster's spelling book and Poor Richard's Almanac and with these she started school in the home. Other children came and about 1856 they were instrumental in building a log school house on Uncle Asaph Wells' place as a central location, and they hired a teacher whose name was W. H. Spencer As soon as more books were secured there was more school. One winter school was held in their own home, the neighbors children joining the class.

After the log school house was built the Methodist circuit riders would come in perhaps once a year. That was a great event in the lives of the youngsters. The father joked his oxen, hitched to the sled and would take the whole family to church and would bring the minister back home in the sled, the children prattling along on foot free as the birds. The yellow legged dominique hen had been slain. There were fried doughnuts, clean faces and possibly a new calico frock for some of the older girls anyway. Well, the preacher liked it too, sometimes stayed for weeks, would

and to leave the State of Oregon was not to be mentioned at all. So her new home was built near the confluence of Elk Creek and the Umpqua river and not far from the point from which she first beheld that river before the advent of the white man, save only the Hudson's Bay Co., on the opposite shore. There in that humble home her blameless life ended Sept., 25th, 1904. She had "fought the good fight of faith" and "finished her course".

The long, long trail was ended that had begun so long ago in that far away land across the seas. Ended in the little town of Elkton, Oregon on the place where now stands the Oregon State Highway Bridge spanning Elk Creek, the stream she forded on horseback with her child in her arms in her attempt to reach this neck of the woods. Eighty years have come and gone since then and many changes have come and gone with the years, but perhaps none greater than the change that has come to the "trail" of 1851. Thus it might be said that the "subject of the sketch" "Anna Elizabeth Wells" blazed the trail and paved the way for the Oregon State Highway to reach the Coast 80 years ago!

Facts taken from Family history.